

# A Fresh Take on CAREER DEVELOPMENT

BY ELISSA TUCKER



These three employers have instituted programs  
to keep the process relevant.

Traditionally, career development has been a highly selective, well-orchestrated process aimed at growing an organization's future leaders through years of formal training and deliberate internal transfers. Today, reduced employee tenure, flat organizational structures, and unpredictable business needs make traditional career development a risky business investment. At the same time, workforce diversity, knowledge work, and the consumer experience mean that both employers and employees seek something different from the career development process.

With these drivers in mind, some best-practice organizations are transforming performance management, opening career development opportunities to every employee—not just those with “high potential”—and making powerful development tools and resources available for easy access, anywhere in the world.

One key to the success of these new approaches is employee empowerment: By placing development tools and opportunities directly into employees' hands, organizations are empowering employees to evaluate what they really want from their careers, take control of their own paths, and seize the resources they need to achieve their goals at the pace they choose.

Organizations are also offering employees more flexible ways to chase the career of their dreams, whether it's through targeted development or leadership training relevant to their current role or through cross-training opportunities that ultimately take their careers in entirely new directions. For some, career moves aren't always promotions—a lateral move to a different business unit can expand competencies and organizational knowledge, sometimes leading to a new career path that is highly valuable to the organization.

Following are examples of how SAS, Schneider Electric, and MITRE are taking this kind of fresh approach to employee careers. In an effort to align with top business priorities, these organizations have opened career development to all employees, have put employees in charge of the process, and are providing them with robust, yet flexible, career support.

## SAS INSTITUTE INC.

Based in Cary, N.C., SAS is the world's largest privately held software business, with more than 14,000 employees and offices in about 60 countries. To meet strong employee demand for development opportunities, SAS has embedded professional development and initiatives for creating future leaders right into its three-year strategic plan. Because turnover is remarkably low—just 3% to 5%—SAS is committed to providing development opportunities that will help mid-career, seasoned employees grow into future leaders, while helping incoming Millennial talent get up to speed and advance in their careers. At the same time, SAS is investing in cross-cultural and global business education

to support an ongoing globalization initiative, which is transforming its subsidiaries into global business units with multicultural teams.

SAS makes it easy for employees at any level to learn about available development opportunities and potential career paths and to pursue professional development and training that fits their career goals.

**Self-service career development portal.** All employees can access career guidance and development opportunities through the SAS employee career portal. This self-service system shows employees how to take control of their career, recognizing their current title and presenting career path options based on the previous moves of employees with similar characteristics. Employees can explore job descriptions and see a full list of competencies for any career path that interests them, and they are directed to specific development opportunities on the learning management system (LMS) that fit their career goals. They can also search for opportunities by keywords, topics, or location.

**Formal career paths.** The LMS automatically assigns a career development path for new employees in certain roles. For example, the sales onboarding path sets expectations for an employee's first six months and tracks each individual's progress toward them. Sales expectations include set deadlines for specific training courses, meetings, activities, customer contacts, account planning, and pipeline requalification.

**Career counseling.** All employees have access to a career counselor, who can help them establish their goals and access available learning opportunities to help achieve them.

**Goal setting and coaching.** Three years ago, SAS got rid of its ratings-based performance management system, replacing it with a process based on setting goals and regular coaching conversations with managers. Because the success of this approach depends on the managers' ability to communicate clearly and help employees align their goals with organizational strategy, SAS provides leadership development to help managers provide high-quality coaching, as well as resources and messaging to guide effective conversations.

**Competency-focused career planning.** SAS recently rewrote its competencies and mapped them to job families, empowering employees to search for learning opportunities by competencies and find relevant positions that are posted internally. This gives employees a clear path for how to move their careers to the next phase.

## SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC SE

France-based Schneider Electric specializes in energy management and automation hardware, software, and services. It is supported by a diverse workforce of 144,000 employees in more than 100 countries. The company's



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competency-driven employee development program provides equal access to self-directed development opportunities for all worldwide employees, while ensuring that specific workforce segments get targeted or accelerated development opportunities when warranted.

Within the company’s open, transparent culture, employees are expected to pursue growth opportunities that will help them better perform their current jobs and prepare for future roles. To meet this expectation, Schneider Electric employs a multipronged approach that achieves “the three E’s” of employee development: experience, education, and exposure. With support from their managers and HR, every employee is part of a structured development process that includes a central portal, competency maps, dual career paths, and learning paths to build competencies where needed.

**Assessment and mapping.** Annual performance reviews assess employee development needs and goals and provide an opportunity for two-way conversation and feedback. The resulting employee development plans populate an ERP system, which automates various development offerings through a learning management system. The LMS also contains competency maps, which employees can access to evaluate their competency gaps and build a development plan to address them.

**Equal opportunity employee development.** Schneider’s HR talent management team ensures that every employee—not just executives and high-potential talent—have the tools, support, and opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. The talent management team works from “hubs” and satellite offices around the globe, and employees at every location worldwide have equal access to development and learning opportunities.

**Central employee development portal.** Annual development plans for each employee reside in a centralized system, accessible via a portal where employees can review them, alongside structured learning paths that tie desired

competencies to specific training and learning opportunities. Employees are also linked to the company’s internal job posting platform.

**Virtual learning.** Some learning experiences are available right inside the portal or through a mobile app, including webinars, curated content, and registration for live learning events.

**Employee-initiated mentoring.** Employees can find a compatible mentor, anywhere within the company’s worldwide operations, by using the mentoring platform within the portal to select the skills or experiences they wish to develop. This platform has enabled hundreds of connections across regions and functions, helping employees form one-on-one relationships to build desired skills.

**Targeted development for specific roles.** Recognizing that different workforce segments have different needs, Schneider Electric offers targeted training dictated by structured learning paths for five key groups of employees. For example, technical specialists—a large part of the workforce—have technical career paths with their own set of opportunities and rewards.

**Cultivation of high-potential talent.** An annual global talent review campaign measures employee performance over time, with each business entity recommending high-potential talent for accelerated career development, including training programs, stretch assignments, special projects, exposure to senior leaders, faster career movement, and access to curated leadership content. A select group of early-career “global enterprise” talent is pulled out for exposure to varied experiences with a variety of markets and businesses and to a higher level of risk and ambiguity to cultivate their leadership potential.

**Leadership academy.** All managers, leaders, and high-potential talent participate in the organization’s leadership academy, which provides specialized training on “soft skills,” such as emotional intelligence, serving customer interests,

coaching, and hidden bias. Required training modules are available both virtually and in-person.

## MITRE

The nonprofit MITRE Corporation operates seven federally funded research and development centers that provide its government sponsors with systems engineering, research and development, and IT support. Its highly educated workforce includes 7,600 employees with an average of 25 years of experience.

Based on employee feedback, the highly matrixed organization redesigned its performance management framework to focus more on professional development and feedback from close supervisors who are intimately familiar with each employee's work. The transformed framework focuses on growth and development, rather than assessment and ranking, and gives employees multidirectional career development and employee assessments based on the value they contribute to the organization.

The foundation of the new framework is MITRE CLEAR Conversations™, in which the acronym stands for "Communicate, Learn, Evolve, Achieve, and Results." Built upon frequent and continuous conversations among employees, their direct supervisors, and work leaders, CLEAR Conversations has three components: align expectations, engage in feedback, and pursue development—all of which are supported with tools and resources.

**Aligned expectations.** Through a series of annual conversations, employees, their supervisors, and work leaders work together to set employee performance goals that can be updated as needed. This team approach to goal-setting overcomes barriers inherent in a matrix organization and ensures that expectations are aligned at all levels.

**Frequent feedback.** Rather than having midyear performance reviews to check in on progress, leaders frequently check in with employees, providing a steady stream of coaching and feedback about expectations, performance, development, behavior, and aspirations. More than 70 resources are available to help team members learn how to give effective feedback. These include checklists, sample conversations and topics, video demos, and online learning modules.

**Career path mapping.** Employees are empowered to map their own career paths, an approach that MITRE has branded as Careers in Motion, represented by a transit map graphic. Emphasizing that careers are flexible, and that MITRE offers multiple paths to help employees achieve their goals, the program encourages employees to access programs, processes, and resources to help people explore new career paths or grow in their current roles.

**Career coaching.** An internal program called Career Insight™ gives all MITRE employees career assessment tools to help

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them understand their strengths and career aspirations, develop a vision of career success, learn about future business needs, and create a career plan to work on with their managers. Certified career coaches are available to help.

**Virtual career center.** In this online portal, employees access tools and resources to help them manage and plan their careers. Topics include technical capabilities at MITRE, networking, communities of practice, success stories, and career programs and opportunities.

**Internal networking.** At an internal social media page called Strength Community MITRE, employees can find and interact with others within the organization who complement their own strengths. At the same time, users learn about MITRE's career management opportunities from other enthusiastic employees, who keep the page active and create viral "buzz" about the resource.

## MEET EMPLOYEES WHERE THEY ARE

Regardless of location, level, or leadership potential, employees today seek to maintain the kinds of skills and experience that employers need most. For flat, diverse, and geographically dispersed organizations, this means offering many different paths that will meet employees where they are in terms of their career development requirements. Empowering employees to take control of their own career path, in alignment with organizational goals—and giving them the support, resources, and tools to do it—builds a sense of loyalty and ensures the organization has a strong base of talent to draw upon as the business environment and workforce inevitably change. [AQ](#)

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